

South Dakota State University

Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange

Agricultural Experiment Station Rural Sociology
Pamphlets

SDSU Agricultural Experiment Station

11-15-1941

The Problem of Declining Enrollment in the Elementary Schools of Davison County

W. F. Kumlien

Howard M. Sauer

C. Scandrette

Follow this and additional works at: http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/agexperimentsta_rural-socio



Part of the [Rural Sociology Commons](#)

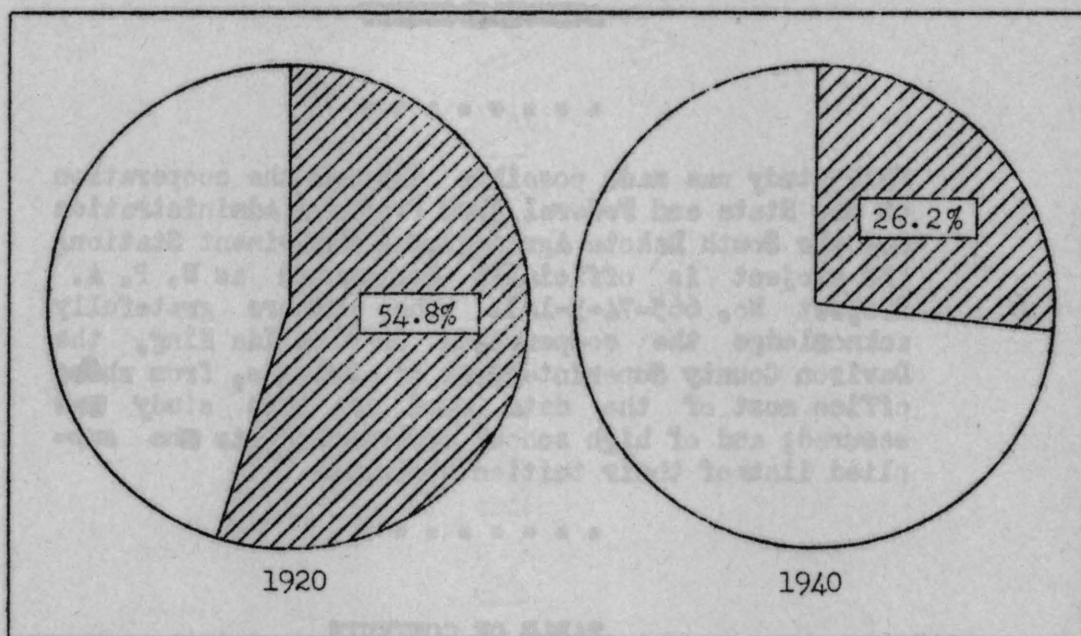
Recommended Citation

Kumlien, W. F.; Sauer, Howard M.; and Scandrette, C., "The Problem of Declining Enrollment in the Elementary Schools of Davison County" (1941). *Agricultural Experiment Station Rural Sociology Pamphlets*. 55.
http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/agexperimentsta_rural-socio/55

This Pamphlet is brought to you for free and open access by the SDSU Agricultural Experiment Station at Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Agricultural Experiment Station Rural Sociology Pamphlets by an authorized administrator of Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. For more information, please contact michael.biondo@sdstate.edu.

THE PROBLEM OF DECLINING ENROLLMENT
in
The Elementary Schools
of
Davison County

W. F. Kumlien
Howard M. Sauer
C. Scandrette



The shaded areas represent the percent of rural school districts with enrollment of 20 or more pupils. There were 23 such districts in 1920, or 54.8 percent of the 42 rural school districts. In 1940 there were only 11 such districts, or 26.2 percent, in Davison county.

Department of Rural Sociology
Agricultural Experiment Station of the South Dakota State College of
Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Brookings, South Dakota

EXPLANATORY NOTE

During recent years, enrollments in most South Dakota elementary schools have declined at a very rapid rate. The prevailing type of rural school district organization in most counties has proved rather ineffective in coping with dwindling enrollments and with the consequent high costs per pupil.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to assist educators, school board members and other Davison county leaders, by analyzing the nature of the problem and by presenting suggestions for its solution; as they have grown out of the experiences of other South Dakota communities.

* * * * *

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

* * * * *

This study was made possible through the cooperation of the State and Federal Work Projects Administration and the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. The project is officially designated as W. P. A. Project No. 665-74-3-143. The authors gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of Miss Ida King, the Davison County Superintendent of Schools, from whose office most of the data used in this study was secured; and of high school superintendents who supplied lists of their tuition students.

* * * * *

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Trend in Elementary Enrollments, 1890 - 1940.	1
Declining Birth Rates and Population Decrease as Factors in Enrollment Trends	2
Elementary Enrollments by District—1920, 1930, 1940.	3-4
Elementary Enrollment as Related to Costs Per Pupil	5-6
When Schools can be Closed Advantageously	7
High School Attendance Areas Suggest Basis for Reorganization	8
Improved Roads Show Increasing Accessibility of Farm Areas to Village Service Centers.	9
How Certain South Dakota Rural Communities are Successfully Solving the Declining Enrollment Problem.	10

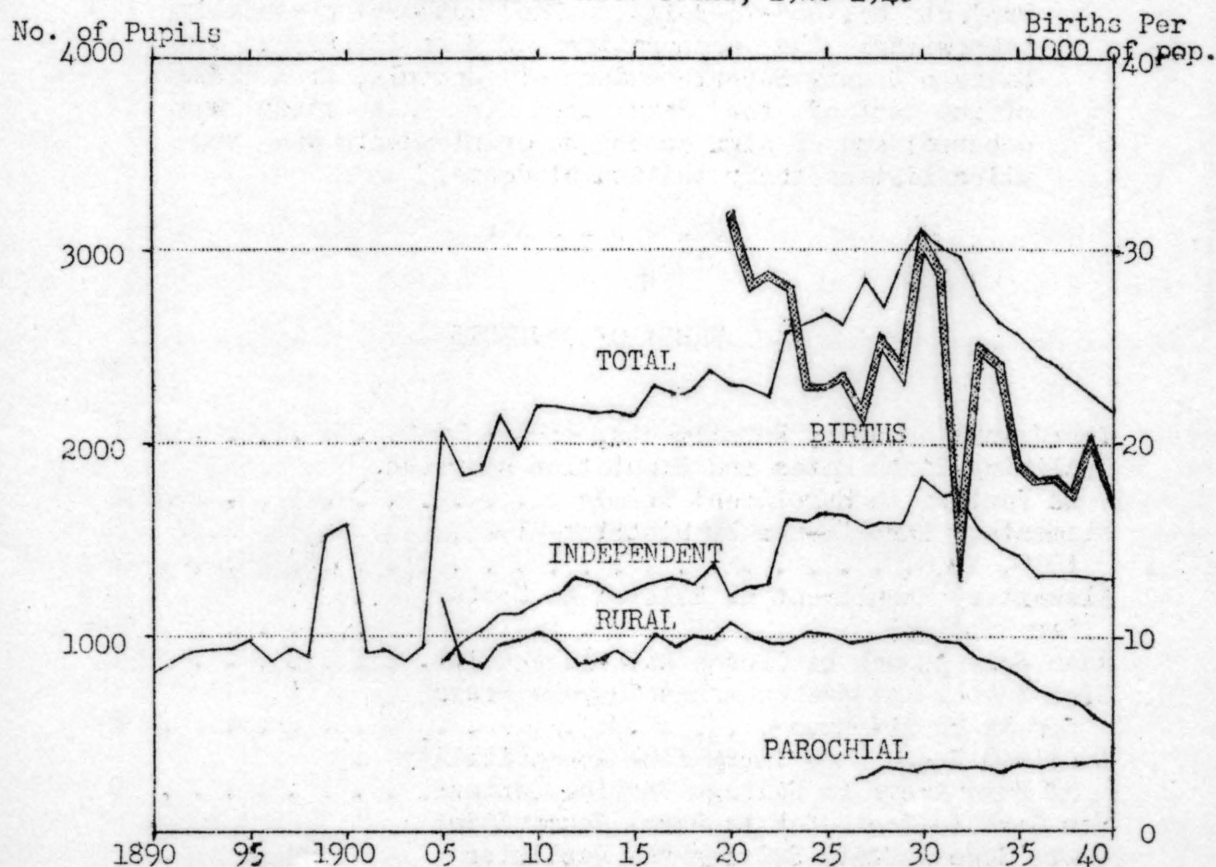
The Problem of Declining Enrollments In the Elementary Schools of Davison County

Population experts have been predicting for a number of years, that the downward trend of the birth rate will cause a serious decline in the elementary school enrollment. This prediction has been fulfilled in Davison county as shown in Figure 1. The total elementary enrollment increased steadily until 1930 when the highest enrollment--3,102 pupils--in the history of the county was reached. Since that time there has been a gradual decline leaving the 1940 enrollment of 2,218 pupils about where it was thirty-five years ago.

Independent, rural, and parochial schools respectively contributed 1,773 pupils, 1,012 pupils, and 317 pupils to the 1930 high total enrollment. By 1940 the independent school enrollment had dropped to 1,320, the rural to 547, and the parochial had raised to 351 pupils.

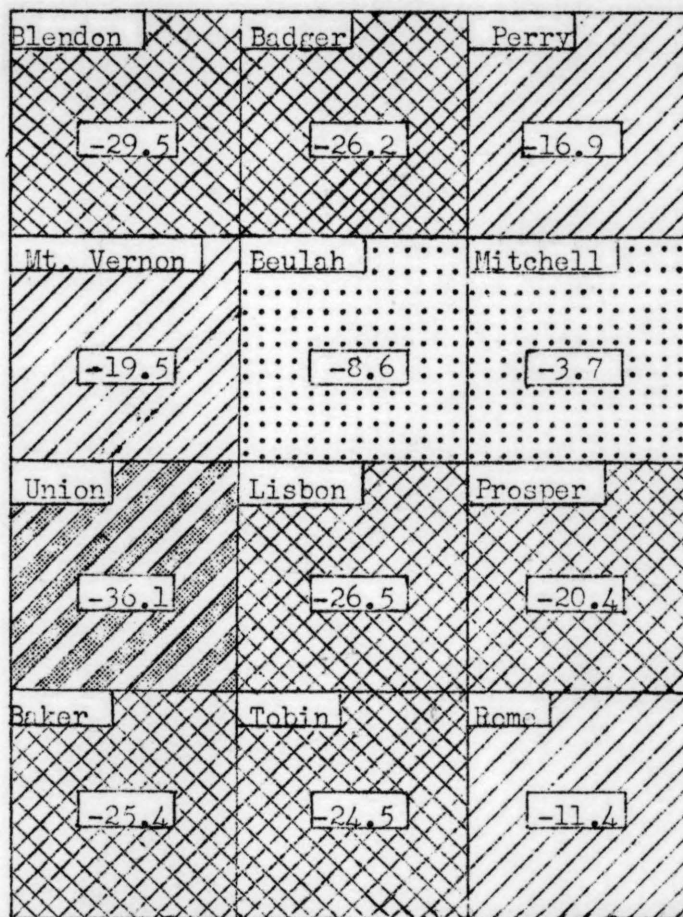
The decline of the Davison county birth rate is also indicated in Figure 1. From the high 1920 average of 30.9 births per 1,000 of the population, the birth rate underwent an extended period of sharp fluctuation to drop to the 1940 mark of 16.9 births per 1,000. This downward trend in the birth rate is the basis for the steady drop in elementary school enrollment.

Figure 1. Elementary Enrollment Trends in Davison County 1890-1940, and the Birth Rate Trend, 1920-1940

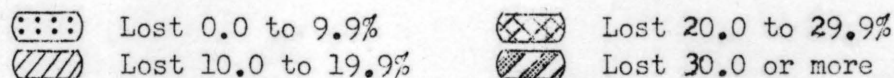


Source: Biennial Reports of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and reports of the State Board of Health.

Figure 2. Population Losses in Davison County, 1930-1940



Legend:

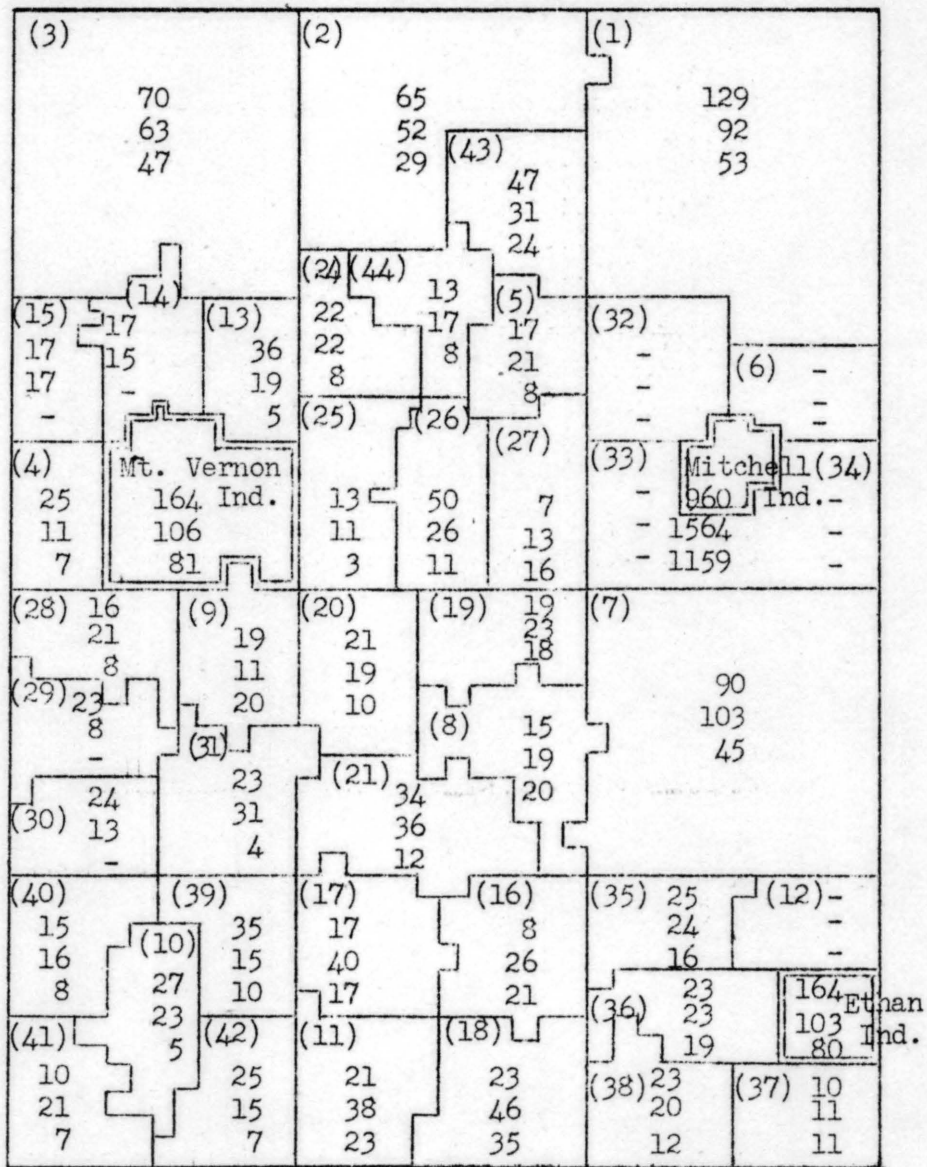


Source: 16th U. S. Census 1940.

One of the basic factors for the decline in elementary enrollment, the loss of population through outward migration, is shown in Figure 2. In the ten year period 1930-1940 the population loss for Davison County was 9.7, which is not an excessively large percent. During this same period, the combined population for the incorporated towns of the county decreased only 3.7 percent. It is evident that the bulk of the population losses were suffered by rural areas, a fact which is reflected in the relatively greater decline in rural enrollments.

All of the townships of Davison County lost in population during the 1930-1940 period, with losses ranging from 3.7 percent in **Mitchell** township to 36.1 percent in Union township. A direct relation between population decrease and enrollment decline is clearly seen by comparing figures 2 and 3 and by computing percent of losses. The township having the greatest percent of enrollment decline usually coincides with the township suffering the greatest population losses.

Figure 3. Elementary Enrollments in Davison County School Districts, 1920, 1930 and 1940



Legend:

Top figure 1920 enrollment
Middle figure 1930 enrollment
Lower figure 1940 enrollment

() Indicates District number

Source:

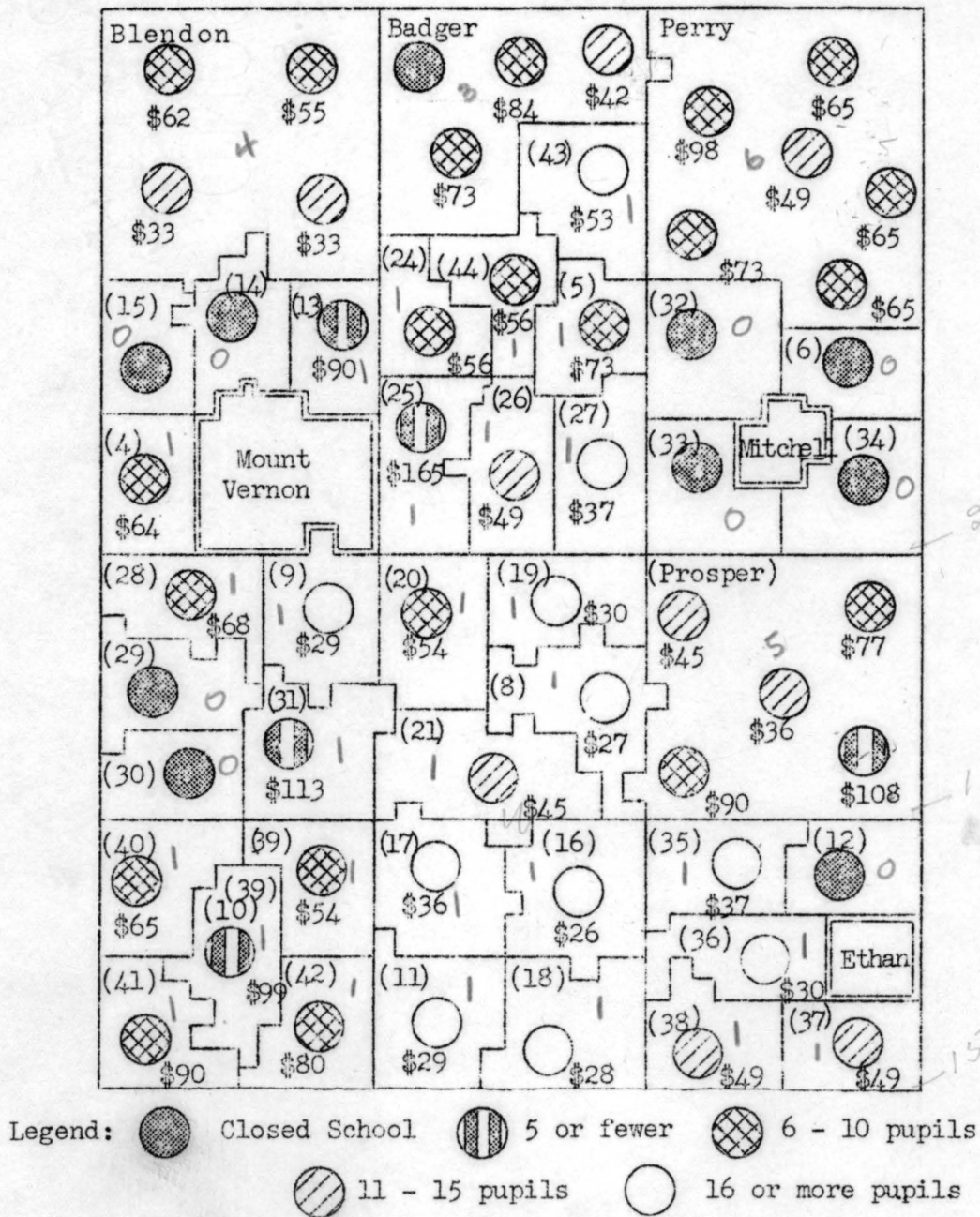
Records of Davison County Superintendent of Schools

In 1940, forty-seven elementary schools were in operation in Davison county, besides the three independent districts of Ethan, Mr. Vernon, and Mitchell.

The decrease in elementary enrollments is shown in Figure 3, which records the enrollment of each district of the county, for 1920, 1930, and 1940. Although there were occasional gains in enrollment in the ten-year period from 1920-1930, or 1930-1940, the majority of the districts show definite losses. Actually, only 16 districts of the 45 in the county show an increase in either period, and only three of these gains were not counteracted by a loss in either the preceding or the following period.

Davison county, closed ten schools in 1940, leaving 47 in operation, as stated above. Of the schools operating, 21 had only six to ten pupils, and five schools had five or fewer pupils. A comparison of enrollment figures for 1940 with those of 1920 shows the serious nature of the enrollment decline. In 1920 there were 1,074 rural school pupils enrolled, but in 1940 the enrollment numbered only 547 pupils. Further enrollment losses may be expected in coming years, unless changes in the population trend occur.

Figure 4. Cost* Per Pupil in the Elementary Schools of Davison County, 1940



Source: Records of Davison County Superintendent of Schools

Illustrated by Figure 4, the wide range in cost per pupil in the schools of Davison county is evident. Almost invariably the cost per pupil is high in schools of small enrollment, and decreasingly lower in schools of greater enrollment. The cost per pupil of operating the rural schools of Davison county varied from \$28 per pupil in District 18, where the school enrolled 35 pupils, to a cost of \$165 in District 25, where the enrollment numbered only three pupils.

Table 1 (below) further indicates the high expense of operation of schools for ten or fewer pupils on a cost per pupil basis. This fact is particularly applicable to schools with an enrollment of only five or fewer pupils. In Davison county the average cost per pupil for the five schools of this latter group was \$110.45, or more than twice the average for all schools which was \$48.94.

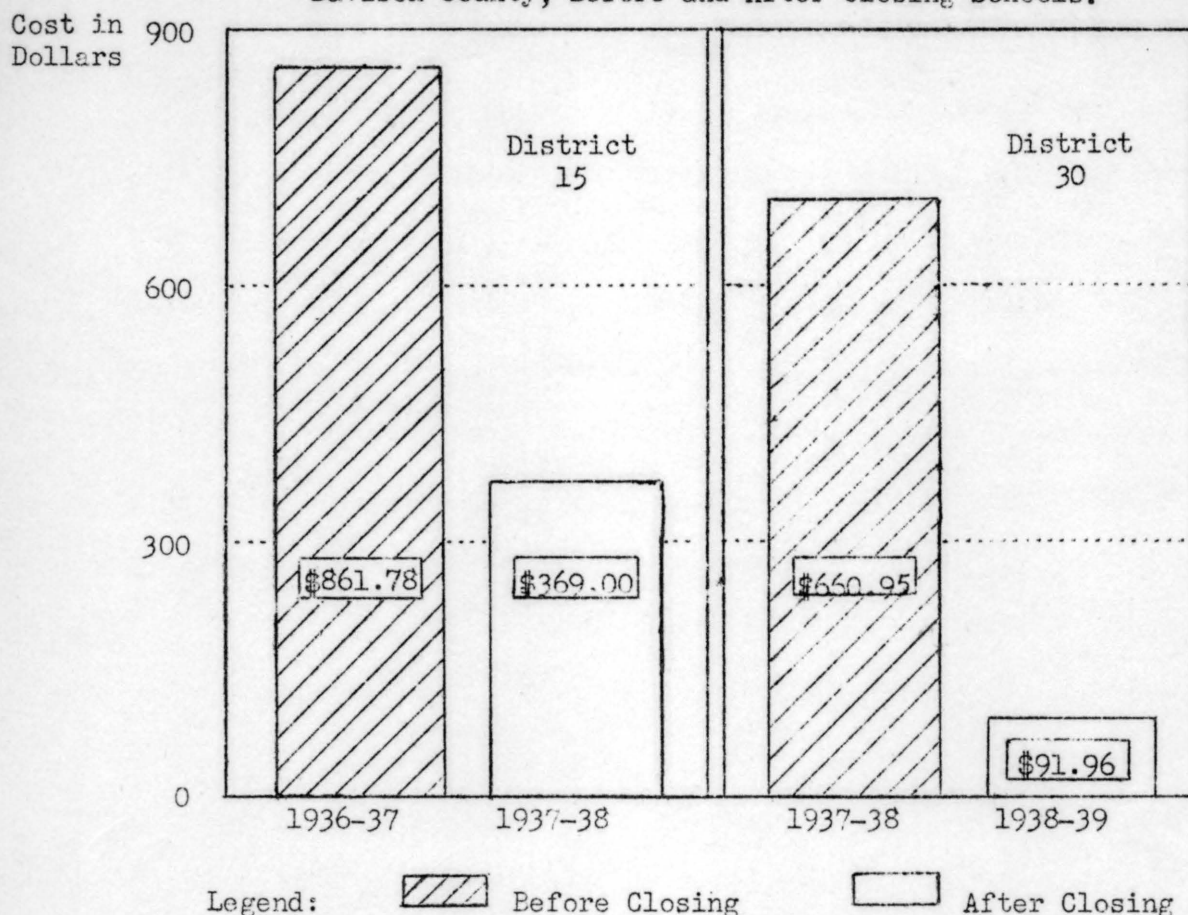
Table 1. Instructional Cost Per Pupil of Operating Schools of Various Sizes in Davison County, 1940. *

Size of School	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils	Total Cost	Average Cost Per Pupil
Total	57	547	\$26,772.00	\$ 48.94
Closed schools	10	--	--	--
5 or Fewer	5	22	2,430.00	110.45
6 - 10 pupils	21	168	11,427.00	68.01
11 - 15 pupils	10	129	5,445.00	42.21
16 or more pupils	11	228	7,470.00	33.29

*Based on Teachers' salaries only

Source: Records of the Davison County Superintendent of Schools

Figure 5. Cost of Operating Schools in District 15 and District 30, Davison County, Before and After Closing Schools.



Source: Records of Davison County Superintendent of Schools

To reduce high per pupil costs school districts throughout South Dakota have recently closed many schools with decreasing enrollments.

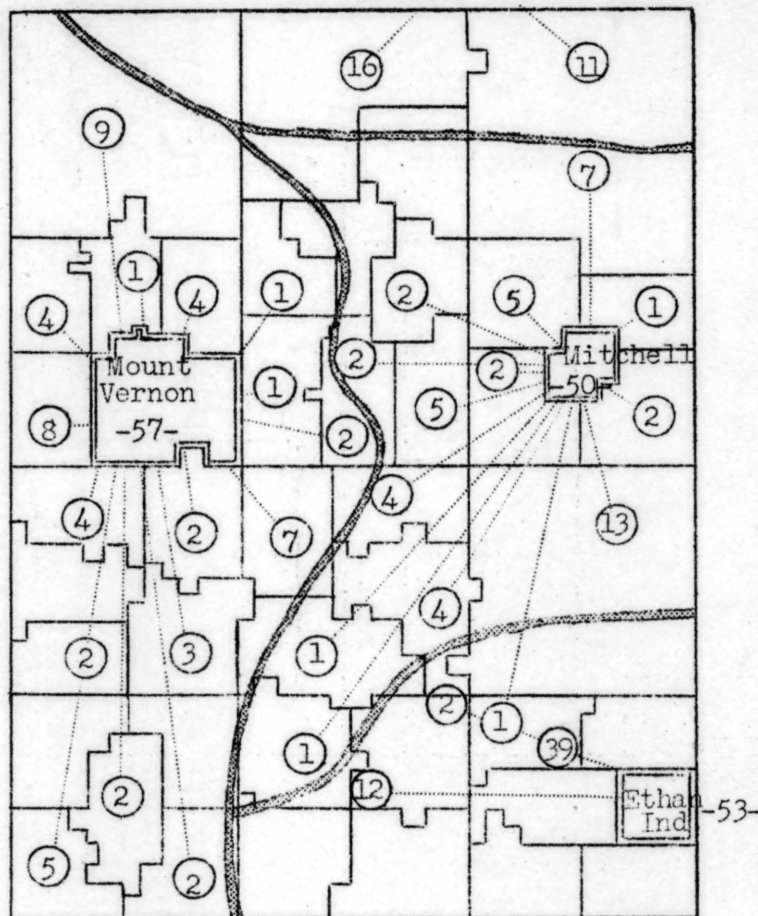
During the school term of 1937-38, operation costs for District 30 totaled \$660.95. In 1938 the school was closed, and the pupils were sent to another district with District 30 paying their tuition and transportation. In that year operating costs to District 30 totaled \$91.96, less than 1/6 of the former costs, or a saving of \$568.99.

By similar means District 15 made a saving of \$492.78, when their operation costs dropped from \$861.78 in 1936-37, to a tuition and transportation payment of \$369 in 1937-38.

Not only is there an obvious financial advantage in this method, but there is a psychological advantage from the standpoint of the intellectual stimulation which competition provides.* Since the cost per pupil increases and the educational efficiency decreases as the enrollment decreases, it seems advisable to close a school when the enrollment drops to five or fewer pupils.

It is common knowledge among teachers that where there are only one or two pupils to a grade it is usually difficult to get students interested.

Figure 6. High School Tuition Areas in Davison County, 1940
Letcher -27-



Legend: ○ Number of students drawn from a district.
Number in independent district is total tuition students.

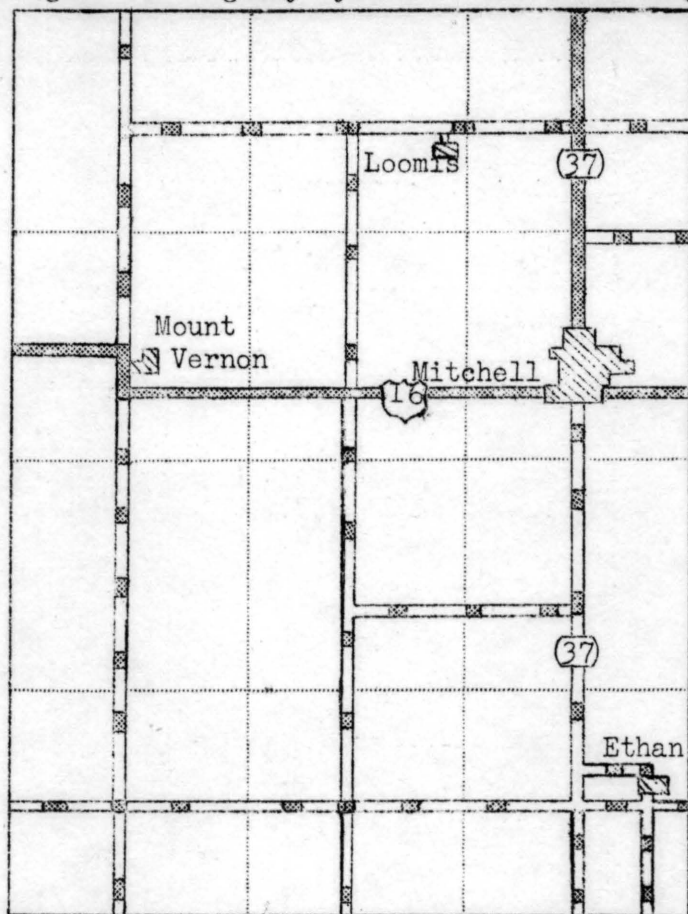
Source: Records of Davison county high school superintendents.



School districts of South Dakota without high schools of their own have been required since 1921 to pay tuition costs for their students who attend high school outside the district. Figure 6 indicates the areas from which Davison county high schools drew their county tuition students, totaling 187 students in 1940.

Realizing that the cost of operating their own secondary schools would be prohibitive, the people of the districts of Davison county have adopted the policy of sending their students to high schools already existing in town and village centers. Perhaps a similar plan could be adapted to elementary education. As elementary enrollments continue to shrink and cost per pupil mount, it would appear to be a practical solution to close the rural schools and send the remaining pupils to village schools. In such a plan the home district would pay tuition and transportation costs. This plan has the advantage of economy, and of extending to farm children the superior facilities and techniques of the town school.

However, until such time as concentration of education services in town centers becomes more general, districts may well continue their policy of closing those schools in which enrollments fall below a minimum and sending their pupils to the nearest rural school still operating.

Figure 7. Highway System in Davison County, 1940



Legend:  Hard Surfaced Roads
 Graveled Roads

Source: Official Map State Highway Commission, 1940

Improved roads have replaced most of the graded dirt roads in Davison County, as can be seen in Figure 7. Good roads and the automobile have brought town and farm within easy reach of each other and have caused rapid changes in most aspects of rural life. Open country institutions, such as the neighborhood crossroads, general store and the open country church, have been shifted to town and village centers. The farmer finds it increasingly convenient to buy groceries, clothing, and necessities, to sell his produce, to attend church and to engage in the varied recreation, in the village center. Furthermore the farmer finds it increasingly convenient to send his sons and daughters to the village high school.

This trend toward the concentration of services may result in a centering of elementary education in the village also. Since both village and rural enrollments have declined, the absorption of rural pupils into village and city schools should not necessarily require any great expansion of existing school plants.

How Certain South Dakota Rural Communities Are Successfully Solving the Declining Enrollment Problem

School boards confronted with the problem of declining enrollments should study their local situation carefully before taking action. The four plans listed below have all been tested by different South Dakota communities and have been found practical. One or the other of the first two alternatives has frequently been used as a temporary measure until further action was necessary. The last two plans are in the nature of a more or less permanent reorganization of the present rural district system.

Cooperating with nearby rural schools

When enrollment has dropped to five or fewer pupils certain districts have kept their district organization intact but have closed one or more schools. In cases where all schools of the district have been closed, the remaining pupils have been sent to the nearest adjoining rural school where satisfactory arrangements for tuition and transportation could be made.

Tuition pupils to town schools

Where satisfactory arrangements could not be made with nearby rural schools, the remaining pupils have been sent as tuition students to the nearest independent school in village or town. This plan is frequently no more expensive than the first, but has the further advantage of better educational experience than is usually possible in the one room school. In effect, it is essentially the same method which has been successfully used in sending farm children as tuition pupils to high school.

Consolidation

Where the second plan has been in operation for a number of years, town and nearby country districts have frequently consolidated into a single district. Such a plan has many advantages, but should first be tried out informally as a centralized school system before determining the details of consolidation.

County-wide district plan

In at least one west river county a county-wide district plan is now in operation. Under such a plan one county school board determines the location of rural schools and can regulate the number of such schools to fit in with the enrollment trend.